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Likes—the key to my happiness: The moderating effect of social influence on travel experience

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Introduction

Social influence is a powerful notion that has the potential to influence all our decisions. It is defined as a directive role that "actors" play in shaping the beliefs and actions of an individual [1]. The impact of social influence on individuals has been studied in many disciplines such as marketing [2, 3], politics [4, 5], management [6, 7], and criminology [8, 9]. Such studies demonstrate that social influence can change the mindset of individuals even after they have made rational choices [10, 11]. Researchers identify that social influence can be introduced through culture, nationality, family, friends, relatives, peers, and superiors [10]. In particular, social influence by the "family and friends" is particularly strong when making intimate decisions such as leisure travel [12]. A leisure travel is usually pre-planned and discussed with the friends and family to gain insights.

Today, there is evidence of the growing participation in and the influence of virtual communities that increase social influence [13]. Research highlights the ability of virtual communities to alter one's perceptions and actions [14, 15]. The advent and proliferation of social media, especially Facebook, is considered a powerful phenomenon that increases social influence on its users [16, 17]. On average, each Facebook user is said to have 338 friends and family members in a Facebook account. Fifteen percent of Facebook users in 2015 had approximately 500 friends [18]. Moreover, more than 1.44 billion Facebook users on average spend more than 20 minutes per day actively interacting with their friends and family [19]. Research asserts that the sheer growth of social media, the number of friends and family included in social media, mobility, and speed have made social media platforms such as Facebook a very powerful platform that further increase social influence on their users [16, 17]. The increased connectedness through social media has also broadened the scope of social influence in travel and tourism. For example, a U.S. Department of Commerce report demonstrated that 31% of 25.4 million holiday travelers in 2015 received inspirations to travel through social media [20]. Similarly, research suggests that travelers often seek post-activity confirmations from their friends and family through social media. It is also reported

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that 52% of travelers changed their original travel plans as a result of comments received through social media [21]. Further, shared information about travel experiences has become an important source that influences the decisions of potential holidaymakers. According to "The Australia.com" Facebook survey, 72% participants used Facebook for seeking "holiday inspirations," and 82% of them were inspired to visit Australia through Facebook. Furthermore, the study found that 70% travelers update their Facebook status while on vacation, seeking acknowledgments from their friends and family [21].

The social influence asserted through Facebook *before* and *after* the travel provides the context to this study. Herein, it is argued that an individual is subjected to social influence prior to travel when s/he receives feedback through comments or likes[1] of about the travel. This influences the traveler's expectations of the destination, places of travel, time of travel, and/or the mode of travel. Similarly, a traveler's post-travel experience is influenced by the comments s/he receives for their postings such as photographs and status updates made during the travels. As such, this study employs the expectation confirmation theory (ECT) to investigate how social media asserts social influence on the traveler's expectations and post-experience. Following Miller [22], it is argued that each traveler will develop pre-consumption expectations and the relationship between expectations (i.e., pre-travel) and confirmation can be moderated by social influence. Similarly, it is logical to argue that their satisfaction (i.e., post-travel) is just as fluid and moderated by social influence.

This research is designed to answer the following research questions: "*Does social influence moderate the relationship between pre-travel expectations and confirmation?*" and "*Does social influence moderate the relationship between confirmation and post-travel satisfaction?*" The scope of the study provides both researchers and practitioners an opportunity to observe the important role of social influence as a moderator.

The two research questions required a longitudinal study to gauge the moderating effect of social influence on (i) the relationship between expectations and confirmation and (ii) the relationship between confirmation and satisfaction in the ECT [23-25]. It is noted that most ECT and social influence studies are simply cross–sectional, and the present study is one of the very few studies to recognize the impact of time lag between variables longitudinally using the same respondents before and after a leisure tour.

[1] In discussion and analysis, for the sake of brevity, this study henceforth refers to both comments and likes as comments.

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The remainder of the paper proceeds in the following manner. The paper first introduces the ECT as the theoretical foundation. Second, the paper presents the research framework and describes the development of hypotheses. Third, the research model is presented discussing the variables of ECT and the moderating role of social influence. Fourth, the longitudinal survey approach is described. Fifth, the findings of the data analysis are presented. Finally, the paper concludes with an overview of the study's contributions to research and practice, limitations, and recommended directions for future research.

Literature Review

This literature review serves two key objectives. First, it introduces social influence in travel and tourism and demonstrates how social media has made the social influence stronger. Next, the research model is discussed, which explicates the effect of (social media) social influence on travel experience and satisfaction using ECT.

Social Influence in travel and tourism

Facebook, which epitomizes social networking sites, "enable(s) users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other" [26, p. 63]. Facebook has already entrenched into our daily routines and is considered as a tool for maintaining relationships [27]. Further, researchers have highlighted the ability of social media such as Facebook to change the attitudes and judgment about one's life [28]. Moreover, extant literature have provided evidence on how social media can influence the buying behaviors of customers [29]. Further, prior literature on social media and its effects [28, 30] argues how social media has a positive and a negative impact on life satisfaction [31, 32]. As such, it is evident that social influence through social media has an impact on an individual's satisfaction.

When Triplett [33] first introduced social influence, it was argued that the mere presence of co-acting human beings has the power to influence other's behavior [33]. Since then, researchers have focused on the formation of social influence and how it actually influences individuals [1, 34-36]. Social psychologists identify social influence as the "change of mind in behaviors, thoughts or feelings from an individual's perspective as revealed by interaction with another individual or a group" [37, p. 13]. Just as pressure can be introduced through a group, social influence can also be viewed as a mechanism of peer

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pressure [37]. In this study, social influence is defined as the force that creates changes in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors because of interactions with another individual or a group of individuals [38, 39].

As mentioned by Kelman [40], alterations in behaviors and mental status occur through (i) compliance, (ii) internalization, and (iii) identification. Compliance refers to the acceptance of social influence to obtain approval or support from the significant others (i.e., influence based on rewards or punishment averse) [14, 40-42]. It is argued that for one to become compliant, an individual could shape their attitudes, feelings, and behaviors as suitable to the subjective social frame of reference (community) [38]. Internalization denotes the acceptance of social influence because of goal and value similarities (acceptance of beliefs of the others) [14, 40-42] or the congruence of one's goals and values with group membership [15]. Identification explains the acceptance of social influence to establish and maintain a satisfying and self-defining relationship (influence based on liking or respecting another person) [14, 40-42].

Social influence in travel and tourism can be argued through two primary positions [43]. Researchers demonstrate that social influence is stronger through (i) word-of-mouth communications [44-47] and (ii) when individuals are situated in unfamiliar circumstances [16]. Chatterjee [48] observed that both word-of-mouth communications and unfamiliarity were often present in travel and tourism. Thus, Prentice [49] argued that social influence is adequately prevalent in travel and tourism. Similarly, researchers identify that a traveler would seek information and confirmation by using their social connectivity and has a strong emphasis on their travel-related decision-making [50]. Such observations are common in all types of travel and tourism [51], including business and leisure travel [52], medical travel [53], package and independent travel [54], and domestic travel [55].

The influence of word-of-mouth has become even stronger with the wide proliferation of social media, which is commonly referred to as electronic-word-of-mouth [17, 56]. Such platforms have made social interaction (and as such the influence) much stronger and frequent between members of the social circles [57, 58]. Further, it is apparent that social circles are becoming larger with the use of social media [17, 59]. Moreover, social media platforms facilitate a fluid many-to-many communication model between individuals who do not necessarily share any social ties [60-62]. In travel and tourism, the influence of social media is uninterrupted in every phase of holiday travel: before, during, and after the holidays [63]. Many scholars argue that social media has fundamentally altered the way an individual

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plans and consumes holiday travel [64, 65]. Social media platforms have enabled travelers to share their experiences real-time [17], over different time horizons [66] in a voluminous proportions [60-62] throughout their travel.

The influence exerted through social media on travel and tourism is observed before (pre-) and after (post-) the travel. With the advancement of social media platforms, there is a change in how a traveler consumes information and how the tourism information is diffused [56]. The ability of the social media to reach a global audience, provide easy access to information, and mass communicate through social media platforms makes it convenient for the travelers to obtain views and experiences of others [67, 68] when planning a travel [63, 69-71]. Because travelers prefer to source information from the people in their social circle than from the strangers, the influence of social media in travel and tourism is significantly strong in making holiday plans [63, 72]. As Munar and Jacobsen [59] stated, potential travelers strongly rely on the information received through their social circles because of their similar subjective evaluations. It means that a potential traveler expects that their experience from the travel would be similar to those of their peers in their social circles.

Similarly, travelers seek post-travel (or during travel) confirmations from their social circles [73]. The ubiquitous accessibility of social media allows travelers to seek such confirmation continuously throughout their travels [59, 74]. Social media platforms provide functionalities to enhance travelers' on-site experiences by "enabling travelers to share, revive and reinforce their travel experiences as well as construct their self-image and status on social network" [75, p. 181]. As such, Lyu [76] and Kim and Tussyadiah [77] stated that travelers post "selfies" as proof of "*I have been there*" to their social circles seeking endorsement.

Moderating effect of social influence on ECT

Because tourism-related products are mostly intangible and experiential in nature [69, 70], an individual's travel can be observed as a process where a service is consumed. Travelers form subjective pre-consumption expectations on their travel based on the information they gather from various sources or from what they had heard about a destination. These sources that influence expectation include (but not limited to) their previous experiences, word-of-mouth, wikis, blogs, consumer reviews, social media platforms, advertising, and promotions [17, 56, 78].

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The ECT [23-25] allows us to better understand the relationship between prior expectations, experience, confirmation of expectations, and how they lead to traveler's satisfaction [79, 80]. (See Figure 1.)

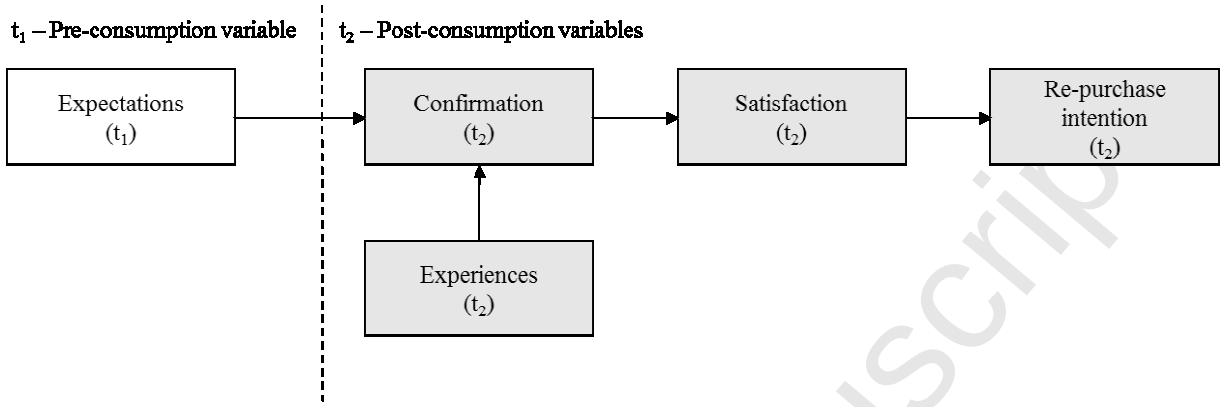

Figure 1: Expectation Confirmation Theory [23-25]

The segment below describes the traveler journey using the ECT. According to the theory, first, the traveler forms expectations of a specific service (in this case, about their upcoming travel). The expectations are formed prior to consumption or while receiving the service (i.e., prior to traveling). Then, the traveler receives services and builds their experience. Experience is a perceived individually and is not uniform across all travelers who have had the same travel. Upon receiving their experience, the traveler evaluates his/her experience against the expectations. This would be a comparison to determine to what degree the expectations were met with the experience received. The state of confirmation occurs when the traveler's experience is higher than what s/he was expecting to receive. If the experience is greater than the expectations, it forms satisfaction (or dissatisfaction, if the experience is less than what was expected). Finally, the traveler forms a decision on intention to revisit based on the level of satisfaction.

The timing of measurement is an important consideration in ECT studies, which was often ignored in the past studies. First, as a general rule of causal model testing, the measurement of independent and dependent variables must be made at two time points. Researchers argue that taking a "snap-shot" view of a model will introduce common method bias [81]. Second, according to the ECT, the measurement of the expectations is best made independent of the measurements of experience and its confirmation. As such, this study seeks a longitudinal design.

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In Figure 1, expectations are defined as the "pre-trial beliefs about a product (or service) that serve as standards or reference points against which product performance is judged" [82, p. 1]. Expectations are also what travelers predict that "should" or "ought to" happen [83, 84]. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman [82] referred to this as the desired state of service. Similarly, Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang [85] stated that travelers' expectations refer to the normative level. As the theory posits [23-25], expectation serves as the baseline for which the actual experience will be evaluated. As such, any changes in expectations (i.e., decrease or increase) would in turn change one's confirmation as well. When a traveler is connected to social media (e.g., Facebook), they obtain additional feedback and/or insights through their network of friends [63], altering one's expectations. The likelihood of such influences on the expectations depends on the confirmation bias, confidence in initial beliefs, and the positive–negative asymmetry of the feedback [86, 87].

The "Experience" variable in ECT refers to one's perceptions of the actual performance of a product, service, or technology artifact [82]. According to the ECT, experience (or perceived performance) is not an evaluation of the service (or product); rather, it describes the immediate post-consumption state that captures the perceived, understood, or remembered understanding of their exposure. In the context of this study, experience denotes what the traveler undergoes during their tour.

The variable "confirmation" is a judgment that the traveler makes by comparing the "experience" and the "expectations" and acts as a subjective prediction to form satisfaction [23-25]. In general, confirmation usually occurs simultaneously when the traveler receives the experience of the travel. However, anecdotal commentary suggests that travelers can "alter" their state of confirmation with the influence of social media. Finally, the level to which the experience is confirmed defines the level of satisfaction [23, 24].

Research Model

The research model is depicted in Figure 2. It shows the proposed moderating effects of social influence embedded in the traditional ECT in two places. As mentioned, a longitudinal survey design allows us to capture this moderating impact of social influence of social media on (i) the relationship between expectations and evaluation of their experience (i.e., confirmation) and (ii) the relationship between confirmation and satisfaction.

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Describing the first moderating instance, it is argued that the relationship between the expectations prior to travel and one's confirmation derived through the actual experience is altered as a result of social influence through social media. According to Buhalis and Law [88], contemporary travelers are more conscious about the information available on the Internet, especially on social media. For example, when someone posts destination information about their approaching holiday on their Facebook, his or her social circle would make favorable or unfavorable comments on the destination, time of travel, places to visit, and the food to taste [89]. Extant literature shows that travelers spend time in obtaining such opinions prior to their travel [56, 90]. Thus, the information gained through social media serves only to modify existing attitudes and perceptions by moderating the impact of experience to confirmation [89]. Such remarks have the potential to alter the relationship between expectations and confirmation. Note that social influence cannot be considered as an antecedent to expectations, as such comments do not form expectations but simply alter the relationship of how they evaluate their experience [91].

Similarly, the relationship between confirmation and satisfaction is altered with social influence through social media. This theoretical perspective captures ones during and after travel experience, where the traveler invites opinions of his or her social circle on the posts made or pictures uploaded during their travel. The comments made by their respective social circles (i.e., social influence) then alter their relationship between confirmation and satisfaction. In the extreme, it is possible that one would alter their post-travel views to negative based on the comments of the social circle, even if s/he had experienced a good holiday and had a positive confirmation initially [21].

In defining the social influence variable as a moderating variable, this study employs the foundations of Baron and Kenny [35, p. 1174] who defined a moderator as a variable that "affects the direction and/or strength of the relationship between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable." The idea of the moderating effect is that the effect of X variable on Y variable can vary, depending on other factors, which are moderators. A moderator influences the strength of the impact of X on Y [91]. The research model also shows how the data were gathered using the longitudinal survey approach. In the longitudinal study approach, the first survey gathered data for expectations and social influence prior to travel, and the second survey gathered data for the remainder of the model.

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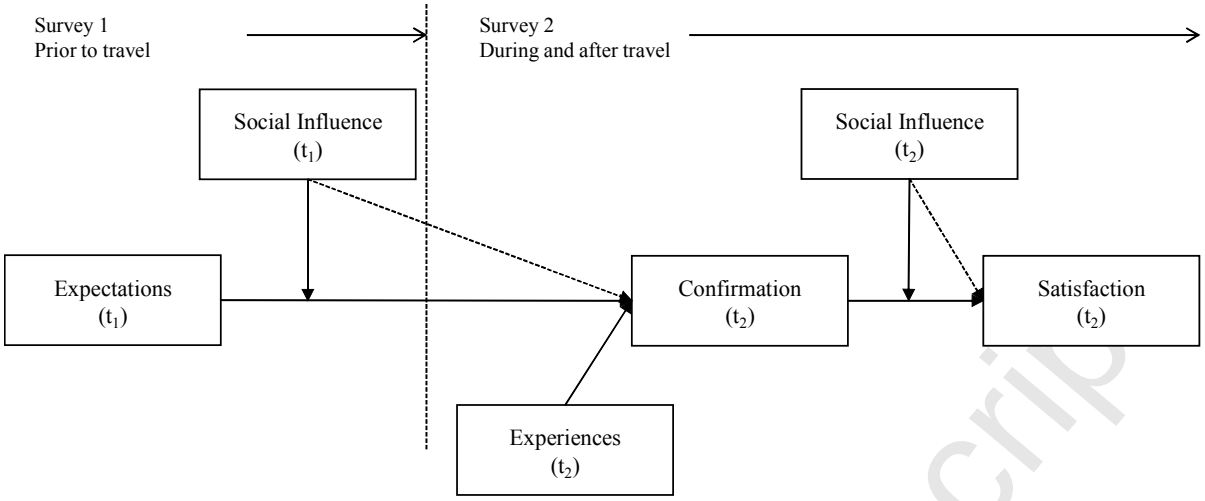

Figure 2: The Research model

Longitudinal Survey

The decision to conduct a longitudinal survey was motivated by scholars who have expressed concerns about the validity of the cross-sectional (snap-shot) approach and their recommendation that the employment of a longitudinal approach reduces the common method variance (CMV) bias and enhances the causal inferences [81, 92, 93]. Longitudinal surveys introduce a temporal separation that allows the reduction of the cognitive accessibility of the respondent to evaluate the independent variables collected at an earlier time. This in turn would minimize the probability that the earlier responses have an influence on the subsequent responses to dependent variables [94, 95].

Our model is consistent with the objectives of the study of understanding *moderation* of social influence and prior studies of social influence [1, 34-36] and ECT [23-25]. A survey instrument was designed to operationalize the variables and measures using a seven-point Likert scale. The scale included the end values of "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (7) and the middle value of "Neutral" (4). The survey instrument included a cover page, which stipulated the code of conduct and ethics of data collection. It also included a clear description of the objective of the survey using lay language. The first survey of the study was conducted 1 week prior to the travel date, and the second survey was conducted within 2 days of completing their holiday. The study focused on identifying a homogenous sample that minimizes the effect of extraneous variables, thus allowing us to isolate the moderating effect of social influence on expectation, confirmation, and satisfaction. As such,

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purposive sampling was adhered to in the current study. The current sample sought homogeneity in terms of the location, mode of travel, place of stay, and much of the demographics of the sample. The sample included individuals traveling in a tour to a popular Asian tourist destination. As such, every respondent had the same treatment of external variables that had been identified in tourism studies (e.g., receiving the same travel experience through hotel, food, and tour facilities), social media influence studies (e.g., all travelers having same Wi-Fi access), and ECT studies (e.g., the travel experience is controlled that they all have the same exposure). Data collection was completed by the tour management on behalf of the researchers at the times stipulated by the researchers using printed survey instruments. The study acknowledges the influence of the tour group itself. However, the members of the tour group did not know each other prior to joining the group. Moreover, to minimize the biasness that may arise from the influence of the tour group members, items were developed specifically focusing on Facebook.

The combined survey instrument is available in Appendix A. The variables and their measures are well established in the literature of the ECT [96-101] and social influence [6, 37, 65, 102, 103]. Measures of social influence and the variables of ECT were treated as reflective. In particular, the study adheres to the guidelines in Figure 1 (page 201) and Table 1 (page 203) of Jarvis, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff [104] in deriving measures and developing variables.

All travelers receiving the survey instrument had an active Facebook account. The term active was derived using the literature of poster and lurker in social media [105, 106], where interaction with Facebook at least once a week was considered an active Facebook user. However, sample demographics revealed that all respondents interacted with Facebook much more frequently. The survey instruments were circulated to 187 members of a tour group. With a response rate of 95%, the survey yielded 178 valid responses. The high response rate was attributed to data collection being managed by the tour management and gathered at their points of contacts. The survey was anonymous. However, to facilitate longitudinal treatment, each respondent was allocated with a unique serial number in survey 1. Then, the survey 2 instrument was circulated to respondents based on their unique identifier.

The details of the respondent sample are illustrated in Table 1.

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Characteristic		
Gender	**#**	**%**
Male	90	50.56%
Female	71	39.89%
Unreported	17	9.55%
Age		
50+	6	3.37%
35-49	21	11.80%
25-34	126	70.79%
24 below	25	14.04%
Number of times to the destination		
Never	156	87.64%
Once or twice	22	12.36%
How many friends in Facebook		
less than 100	24	13.48%
101-300	109	61.24%
301-400	44	24.72%
401-500	1	0.56%
Facebook has become a daily routine		
Strongly Disagree	5	2.81%
Disagree	15	8.43%
Somewhat Agree	45	25.28%
Agree	53	29.78%
Strongly Agree	60	33.71%

Table 1: Demographic details of the respondent sample

The sample includes mainly young adults, between the ages of 25 and 35 years, which is consistent with Facebook user statistics [107]. As such, we gain a high degree of confidence of the representativeness of the sample. The distribution of the genders is somewhat balanced between male and female. It should be noted that it is possible that the number of friends in Facebook and the nature of Facebook use may impact social influence. However, given that over 85% of the sample have between 100 and 400 friends and that 89% of the sample acknowledge that using Facebook is part of their daily routine, the impact of social network behaviors of the travelers is unlikely in the current study [14]. Although we recognize that nuances such as the number of friends and the number of times used per day may be relevant to the extent to which social influence is perceived, such distinctions are not sought in the study. Moreover, tourism research argues that the number of prior visits may influence one's experience. With 88% of the sample having never visited the location, it was

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deemed unlikely that such biasness may be introduced in the current sample. In the following analysis, to further minimize the respondent bias, we only include those who had never been to the location (n=156). The characteristics of the sample are within the boundaries of frequently cited tourism and social media studies [16, 17], which gave confidence to engage in further data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is illustrated using the following topics: (i) content validity (which was tested using the content validity ratio [CVR]), (ii) construct validity (which was tested using the composite reliability, average variance extracted [AVE]), and (iii) testing of moderation of social influence. The analysis was completed using IBM Amos 23 and IBM SPSS 23.

Content Validity

Though the variables and measures of both social influence and ECT were not derived inductively, establishing content validity was not mandatory. However, the study employs the guidelines of McKenzie, Wood, and Kotecki [108] for establishing content validity, which entailed four steps[2]: (i) following the guidelines of Lynn [109], a preliminary survey instrument was derived using the past literature; (ii) following the guidelines of the American Educational Research Association [110], a panel of respondents different to those that are in the sample was established to review and evaluate the possible survey questions, ensuring that the panel had the necessary training, experience, and qualifications; (iii) the panel reviewed the instrument, instructions, and the items; and (iv) the panel assessed the questionnaire on how well each item is represented by each variable. Finally, using CVR for each item and using the formula proposed by Lawshe [111], a quantitative assessment was made. The test resulted in returning a minimum CVR value of 0.75 (at $p<0.05$). Feedback from the pilot test respondents was incorporated to the survey design [108, 109, 111].

Construct Validity

Construct validity was established using (i) factor analysis, (ii) testing the common method biasness, (iii) observing the composite reliability, and (iv) establishing AVE. First, the discriminant and convergent validity of the items were established by using confirmatory

[2] The four-step approach followed here is analogous to the Q-sort approach for attaining content validity [112-114].

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factor analysis. Here, each item loading of the variables was observed by using the heuristic of 0.5 on their assigned factor, and that the loadings within the variable were higher than those across the variables. The factor structure demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with 0.714 as the lowest, which is well above the proposed threshold level of 0.5 [115]. Further, there were no substantial cross-factor loadings. Table 2 demonstrates the results of the factor analysis with results below 0.35 suppressed. The factor analysis revealed that all variables of ECT (factor structures of 1–4) and social influence (factor structures 5 and 6) loaded as expected.

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Expectations1	1	0.991					
Expectations2		0.754					
Expectations3		0.891					
Expectations4		0.781					
Expectations5		0.923					
Experience1	2		0.885	0.503			
Experience2			0.833				
ExPerience3			0.753				
ExPerience4			0.973				
ExPerience5		0.371	0.801				
Confirmation1	3			0.771			
Confirmation2				0.746			
Confirmation3				0.737			
Confirmation4				0.714			
Satisfaction1	4				0.888		
Satisfaction2					0.917		
Satisfaction3				0.351	0.814		
Satisfaction4					0.853		
SocialInfluence1	5					0.922	
SocialInfluence2						0.899	
SocialInfluence3						0.924	
SocialInfluence4						0.909	
SOcialInfluence5	6						0.827
SOcialInfluence6							0.883
SOcialInfluence7							0.990

Table 2: Factor analysis of the variables in the research model

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Second, the study attempts to minimize CMV employing a longitudinal study design. Moreover, as observed by Gorla, Somers, and Wong [116], CMV is more likely to exist in abstract variables than in the concrete measures associated with social influence. Even so, paying attention to the need to reduce CMV, the items for social influence, expectation, experience, and confirmation were subjected to the Harman [117] one-factor test, with the result that not all the measures led to a single factor solution, thus confirming that CMV was unlikely.

Third, the study establishes two measurement models to estimate and assess the internal consistency [e.g., 118]. The analysis revealed high and significant alpha scores, above 0.85 [119], for all the variables of ECT and social influence, and all were significant at 0.001 level. (See Table 3 for details). Finally, the convergent validity was established using the AVE. Herein, the objective was to establish satisfactory levels of convergent and discriminant validity. The analysis resulted in AVE scores for all variables measuring above 0.5 [120]. Further, the AVE of each variable is greater than the variance shared between the variable and other variables [121]. All indications suggested strong discriminant validity.

	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6
Expectations1 (1)	0.823	0.767					
Experience1 (2)	0.891	0.124	0.888				
Confirmation1 (3)	0.926	0.401	0.013	0.873			
Satisfaction1 (4)	0.871	0.114	0.413	0.152	0.974		
Social Influence (in T1) (5)	0.864	0.009	0.301	0.193	0.213	0.754	
Social Influence (in T2) (6)	0.834	0.101	0.116	0.228	0.09	0.296	0.822

Table 3: Reliability and average variance extracted (AVE)

Investigating the Moderation Effect

Next, the moderation effect of social influence is investigated. The study employs the recommendations of Goldthorpe [122] to test the hypothesized cause and effect based on covariations using two structural equation models (SEM) that estimated the associations between the independent and dependent variables at time-t_1 vs. time-t_2. This analysis provides a comparative assessment of the effects of the independent variable (collected at time-t_1) upon the dependent variables, both cross-sectionally (i.e., time-t_1) and longitudinally (i.e., time-t_2). As such, the research model in Figure 2 is now decomposed to create Figure 3 to test moderation in time-t_1 (pre-travel) and time-t_2 (during and post travel).

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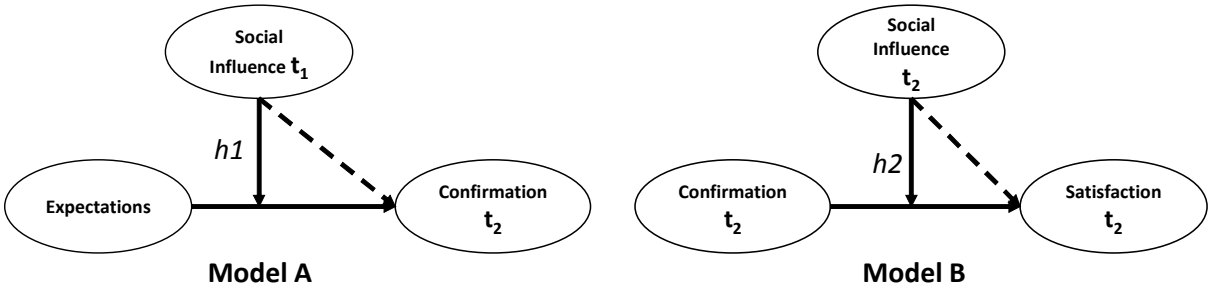

Figure 3: Testing the moderation effect

Model A measures the moderation of social influence in time-t_1 on the relationship between expectation in time-t_1 and confirmation in time-t_2, while model B measures the moderation of social influence in time-t_2 on the relationship between confirmation in time-t_2 and satisfaction in time-t_2. When testing the moderation of social influence, this study employs the studies of Aiken and West [123] and Cohen and Cohen [124]. They argue that the nature and/or strength of two variables change as a function of a third variable, demonstrating moderation.

Table 4 presents the analysis of Figure 3, where the dependent variables, i.e., confirmation in model A and satisfaction in model B, are predicted by the social influence at time-t_1 and time-t_2 (results are significant at 0.001). The results indicate, according to the ECT, that expectation alone influences confirmation in model A and confirmation alone influences satisfaction in model B. Similarly, social influences in time-t_1 and time-t_2 do not have a direct statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. However, in relation to model A, the interaction effect of expectations and social influence on *confirmation* demonstrates a higher value than the direct effects, with a standardized beta of 0.557 (significant at 0.001) outlining the moderation effect. In model B, the interaction effect of confirmation and social influence on *satisfaction* demonstrates a higher value than the direct effect with a standardized beta of 0.456 (significant at 0.001) outlining the moderation effect.

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	Beta	t-statistic	Sig.
MODEL A			
Expectation	0.391	3.961	0.001
Social Influence	0.477	13.142	0.001
Expectation and Social Influence (h1)	0.549	15.899	0.001
MODEL B			
Confirmation	0.086	1.601	0.001
Social Influence	0.431	12.671	0.001
Confirmation and Social Influence (h2)	0.355	13.653	0.001

Table 4: Social influence moderation analysis

Finally, this study seeks further insights as to how high, neutral, and low levels of the moderating variable (i.e., social influence) change the nature of the relationship in models A and B in Figure 3. The low, neutral, and high classification was derived by aggregating the social influence items by using the simple average between 3 and 5 in the Likert scale as "neutral," more than 6 as "high," and less than 2 as "low." The classification of social influence as high, neutral, and low is consistent with prior studies of social influence [125]. The analysis reveals how the continuum of the moderator variable influences the relationship between independent and dependent variables. This approach employs the guidelines of Aiken and West [123].

For model A, scatter-plot regression analysis using the three groups (i.e., high, neutral, and low) of social influence highlighted that expectations had a positive relationship (correlation at 0.67, significant at 0.001) with confirmation when social influence is *high* (63 respondents). When social influence is *neutral* (43 respondents), the correlation between expectations and confirmation is at 0.94 (significant at 0.001); however, when the social influence is *low* (50 respondents), it provided a correlation of -0.76 (significant at 0.001). (Please see Appendix B for the scatter plots.)

For model B, scatter-plot regression analysis using the classification (i.e., high, neutral, and low) of social influence highlighted that confirmation had a positive relationship (correlation at 0.77, significant at 0.001) with satisfaction when social influence is *high*. When social influence is *neutral*, the correlation between confirmation and satisfaction is negative at 0.41 (significant at 0.001), while *low* levels of social influence yielded a correlation of -0.91 (significant at 0.001). (Please see Appendix B for the scatter plots.)

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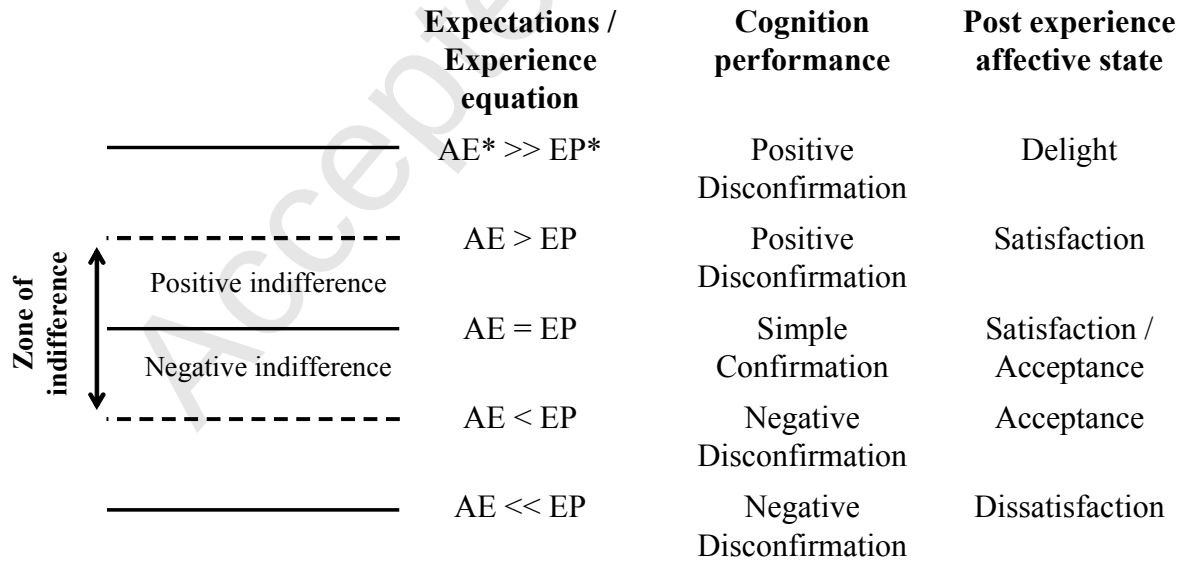
Summary and Discussion

The aforementioned findings provide new insights about social influence specific to travel and tourism. The study evidenced that social influence has a strong moderation effect on the relationship between expectation and confirmation. In observing this relationship, social influence ascended through social media moderates the relationship between pre-travel expectation and confirmation. The study results in Model A of Figure 3 found that social influence makes the traveler align closely with the "reality" of what should be expected during travel (the relationship between expectation and confirmation is moderated by social influence). The accessibility, wide proliferation, and ease of use in social media allow members of a social circle to engage effectively with the potential traveler about what to expect at the holiday destination.

As such, the traveler is more likely to enter the "zone of indifference" [126, 127], implying that satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) can result in a level of disconfirmation existing beyond the scope of this zone. As depicted in Figure 4, the study results suggest that social influence pushes the experience to the zone of indifference, making experience slightly better than or worse than the original expectations of a traveler. As such, disconfirmations of expectations are less likely to occur.



*AE = Actual Experience; *EP = Expected Experience

Figure 4: Zone of Indifference in ECT

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Theoretically, positive or simple disconfirmation can *only* lead a traveler to a state of satisfaction (or acceptance). In other words, when one's confirmation is in the zone of indifference, they are content with their experience and are likely to be satisfied. However, examining the second moderation of social influence on the relationship between confirmation and satisfaction, this study reveals that *low* social influence can make a traveler disappointed if, for example, the comments of his social circle are negative. Similarly, regardless of the post experience affective state (see Figure 4), a traveler is likely to be satisfied if his/her social circle comments positively about his/her travel photographs and status updates. The evidence above is contradicting to the traditional view of ECT, in that the study finds that the affective responses of acceptance and satisfaction do not equate to expectations between the minimum tolerable (or the adequate) and the desired. The findings of the study concur with those of Chen and Lee [128] who found that interaction on social media can result in decreased self-esteem, causing dissatisfaction. As such, the study findings demonstrate that post-travel affective responses can no longer function as a predictor of a consumer's satisfaction.

Theoretical contributions

For the ECT, the study makes three significant contributions. First, the strong and significant moderation effect of social influence on expectation–confirmation relationship provides a rationale to reconsider the ECT's model assumptions. Second, this study demonstrates that although the initial expectations are still the primary predictor of confirming their experiences in travel encounters, social influence is likely to push the traveler's expectations to a reasonable limit. Third, unlike in the past, the ubiquitous and real-time social media can alter (i) the stability of the initial beliefs about initial predictions and evaluations, (ii) the level of confidence on the perceived certainty of initial predictions and their evaluations, and (iii) proportion or the asymmetry of the positive and negative social influence on both initial predictions and evaluations.

Further, this study considers the positive and negative effects of social influence derived from social media on expectations and satisfaction. The study highlighted that using social media could provide informational gains and ease of access. However, it has the potential to introduce dissatisfaction through social media interactions.

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Practitioner Implications

There are two specific practitioner contributions arising from this study. First, from the perspective of expectation management, the study findings highlight the importance of expectation management. Managers should be careful in providing false information regarding the location. There are risks in providing false expectations for either travel planning or tourism management. Social media is considered a powerful "word-of-mouth" source, which can be turned into a source of negative influence from displeased customers. Therefore, it is important to manage social media properly. Second, from the perspective of social influence, the study findings highlight the importance of leveraging on the social influence. The study findings highlight that the relationship between perception and satisfaction can be moderated by social influence. Thus, managers will likely increase customer satisfaction by managing related social media information properly. Further, we identified that there is no association between the number of friends an individual has on social media and social influence. However, the study findings revealed that an individual is influenced by their social group (peers, friends, and family). As such, travel and tourism managers should leverage on influencer-targeting strategies.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations in the current study. First, the study uses only one type of social media. Instead, inclusion of a bundle of other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram has the potential to add more insights. Second, the homogeneous study sample may add some bias to the study findings. Although the study sample largely conforms to the Facebook user demographics, testing the study results using an inclusive sample of other demographics will increase the generalizability. Moreover, the inclusion of variables associated with multiple locations and various holiday types and locations may provide deeper insights into how individuals alter their expectations. Third, researchers have the opportunity to replicate the study using a large sample with diverse characteristics. Such a study will improve the generalizability of the findings.

The study adequately describes the role of social influence in the variables associated with the ECT. The high and significant r^2 values mean that further investigation into the moderating role of social influence in travel and tourism associated with ECT is not necessary. Thus, it is proposed that future research could gainfully focus on the approach and method proposed to better understand social influence in further details. Four research

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directions for future research are herein identified. There is an opportunity to contribute to a deeper understanding of each of the salient social media channels to better understand how each social media platform moderates the variables in ECT. It is also plausible that the same research model be employed with the social influence ascended through Twitter (or any other social media platform) as a moderating variable. Second, researchers could contribute to a better examination of the maturity of technologies in the technology landscape and how they evolve in facilitating social influence. Inclusion of such contextual understanding in a future study would provide unique insights to the referent disciplines. Third, there is an opportunity for researchers to contribute to the development of a "social media influence index." Such indices are rare in travel and tourism (and social media), and derivation of such an index would yield a better understanding of the risk and returns of investments. Finally, future research studies could focus on the interconnectedness and contingencies among social influencers. Although the connectivity between social circles is obvious and evidently complex, such a study would add further insights into the role of social media in facilitating social influence.

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Appendix A: Survey Instruments

About you…… (Survey 1 and Survey 2)

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Age: ☑ 50 and Over ☐ 35 to 49 ☐ 25 to 34 ☐ 24 and Below

3. Number of times that I have been to this holiday destination:

☐ Never ☐ 1-2 Visits ☐ More than 3

4. Facebook has become part of my daily routine

Strongly disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ Strongly agree

5. How many friends do you have on Facebook? ☑ <100 ☐ 101-300 ☐ 301-400 ☐ 401-500

[SOCIAL INFLUENCE BEFORE TRAVEL] Before my travel…….. (Survey 1)

1. I used Facebook to obtain specific views and opinions about this holiday
2. I asked my Facebook friends about what to expect during this holiday
3. I have a set routine of asking my Facebook friends about holidays
4. I typically check comments on Facebook about my holiday destination

[EXPECTATIONS] My expectations before the travel…….. (Survey 1)

1. I expect to receive very good service during my holiday
2. I expect my overall holiday experience to be consistently good
3. I expect the holiday service providers would understand my needs well
4. I expect this holiday to be well worth the money spent
5. Overall, I expect to have a good time in this holiday

[EXPERIENCE] My experience……. (Survey 2)

1. The quality of service I received during my holiday is excellent
2. My holiday experience is consistently good
3. The holiday experience is exactly what I wanted
4. The holiday experience is well worth for the money I spent
5. Overall, I really liked my holiday

[CONFIRMATION] How I evaluate my experience……. (Survey 2)

1. My holiday experience is better than what I had expected
2. The service I received during this holiday is better than I had expected

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3. The service delivered during this holiday is consistent with what I had expected
4. Overall, most of my holiday expectations were confirmed

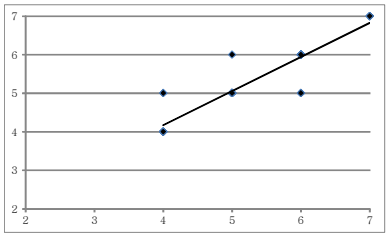
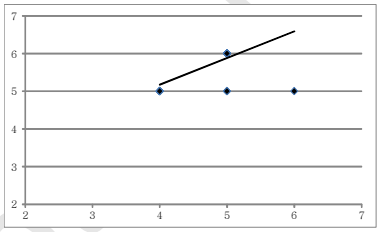
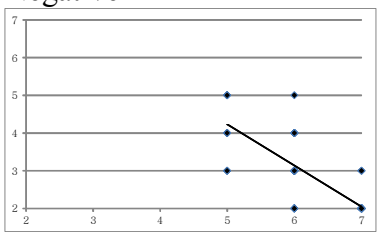
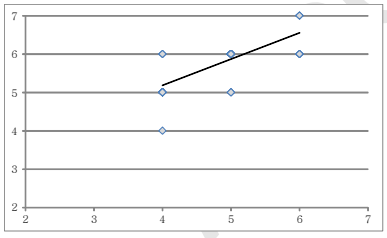
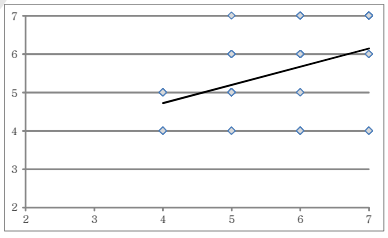
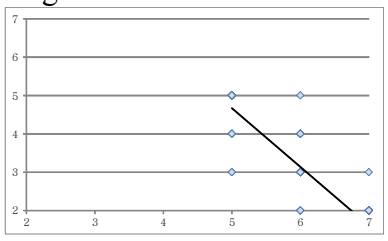
[SOCIAL INFLUENCE DURING/AFTER TRAVEL] Sharing my holiday experience…….. (Survey 2)

1. My friends had positively commented on the photos that I had posted on Facebook during my holiday
2. My friends "LIKED" photos that I shared on Facebook during my holiday
3. I received the desired number of "LIKES" and "COMMENTS" on my posts of my holiday

[SATISFACTION] Satisfaction…….. (Survey 2)

1. I feel satisfied with the service I received during this holiday
2. I am pleased with the experience I had during this holiday
3. I am very content about choosing this holiday
4. Overall, I am very satisfied with this holiday

Appendix B: Scatter Plots

Model A		
Positive	Neutral	Negative
		
Model B		
Positive	Neutral	Negative
		

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